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SUBJECT: BULGARIA ON KOSOVO: CONCERNED, ACTIVELY ENGAGING
NEIGHBORS FOR A SOFT LANDING

REF: STATE 165486

Classified By: Pol/Econ Chief Jim Bigus for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: Bulgaria, concerned about the fallout from Kosovo independence, is working actively in the region to maintain (or build) EU unity on Kosovo and advocating the Ahtisaari plan with the Serbs. Following his visit to Belgrade December 17-18, FM Kalfin will attend a trilateral meeting on Kosovo with Greece and Romania in Athens on December 22, and may visit Pristina after Christmas. He is also preparing a formal request for U.S. assistance to Kosovo in the event of a Serb blockade. MFA officials here are optimistic about finding an EU consensus on a "coordinated declaration of independence" (CDI) that would allow the few holdouts to stand aside but not block the EU majority from recognizing Kosovo. But, spooked by Serb threats, they continue to insist that Bulgaria cannot be in the "first wave" of countries to recognize Kosovar independence. END SUMMARY.

Bulgaria's road to Europe runs through Serbia. . .

¶2. (C) We delivered reftel demarche to Deputy Foreign Minister Kyuchukov on December 12. He told us the GOB is concerned about the repercussions from Kosovo independence and the EU reaction and would take an active role in the region to "make sure our concerns and experience are heard." FM Kalfin will attend a trilateral meeting with Greece and Romania, "the most frontline EU states," in Athens on December 22 to discuss the "European perspectives of Serbia and Kosovo." Kyuchukov was optimistic about finding an EU consensus that would allow the few holdouts to stand aside but not block the majority of EU states from recognizing Kosovo.

¶3. (C) Recognition will be a difficult decision, Kyuchukov said, since Bulgaria's physical road to Europe runs through Serbia, and ordinary citizens will have problems. "We don't want our experience of the 1990s Yugoslavia embargo and the growth of organized crime repeated, and we also can't have a frozen conflict for the same reasons." Bulgaria was talking openly to the Serbs about this, but their rhetoric is getting harsher. Kyuchukov said he hoped the Serbs would relent after a period of retaliation but could not be confident of it. "We can't say after four or five months they will get tired and come to an agreement with us."

¶4. (C) Kyuchukov said Bulgaria was pressing Pristina and Belgrade not to take steps, "especially military ones," to

destabilize the region. He appreciated the Kosovars' willingness to work with the international community and to take political developments, particularly the Serbian elections, into consideration. The EU is continuing to consider the right mode of military and civilian deployment while giving "strong signals to Belgrade and Pristina about their European future. No one wants an isolated Serbia."

¶15. (C) On the Russians, Kyuchukov said "they cannot lose in this situation." All their statements are negative and show no sign of flexibility. The Russians had already launched a discussion paper in the UNSC and reaction to it would be important. Legalities of EU action had to be considered. An invitation to the EU from the Kosovars to send a mission would be unacceptable to the Serbs, Kyuchukov said, and this is where it would be useful to have an invitation from UN SYG Ban Ki Moon.

. . . so inaction is not an option

¶16. (C) On December 17 Office Director for Western Balkans Krassimir Tulechki confirmed that Bulgaria is taking the initiative to work within the EU to reach a consensus position and to engage the Serbs directly to "make clear the realities of the situation." Bulgaria would prefer not to recognize a unilateral declaration of independence, UDI, but would recognize a CDI, "coordinated declaration of independence," done in coordination with the EU and U.S. and backing the Ahtisaari plan. (NOTE: Kyuchukov told us earlier that a UDI suits the Serb hardliners. "It can be challenged now and forever. It's the best way for them to lose and be the victims.") The Kosovars are cooperating on the CDI, Tulechki said. He was optimistic about reaching a consensus EU position, saying "at least 20-21 countries" were on board so far for recognition. Romania, Greece, Cyprus and Slovakia would be the most difficult.

¶17. (C) Tulechki said Bulgaria is consulting with other EU members on steps to take in reaction to a possible Serb cut-off of roads, electricity and water to Kosovo and neighboring states that recognized Kosovo. U.S. help would be needed to ease the situation in Kosovo, "especially fuel for generators," and that FM Kalfin would approach us with a formal request once a list is drawn up. Responding to an earlier request, we provided Tulechki with biographical information on controversial Kosovar millionaire and politician Bedjet Pacolli. Tulechki said the MFA was seriously considering working with Pacolli to deliver assistance to Kosovo in the event of a Serb blockade and that FM Kalfin planned to meet him in the near future. Tulechki said he questioned whether Pacolli should be met at such a high level, but Kalfin made the decision.

¶18. (C) COMMENT: The Bulgarians, acting largely on their own initiative but within the boundaries of EU decisions, are making a good faith effort to be a bridge between Belgrade and Brussels and to bring the difficult states (Greece, Romania, Slovakia and Cyprus) on board with an EU consensus -- or at least prevent them from being spoilers. We are encouraging the GOB to recognize Kosovo earlier rather than later, but fear of Serb retaliation (tied to scars from the post-1999 embargo) is still extremely strong. FM Kalfin's early January trip to Washington will provide Bulgarian insight into any evolution in the views of Romania and Greece, and help frame Bulgarian decision-making as we reach an endgame.
END COMMENT.

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